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Ten Years of AAPAM and the state of
Public Administration and Management
in Africa: Review and Prospects

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MANAGING THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT: THE NEW CHALLENGE FOR THE AFRICAN PUBLIC POLICY-MAKER

LC/NAIROBI

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I. The chronological development of environmental issues

1. The "environmental movement" that generated the historic United Nations global conference on the Human Environment in 1972 at Stockholm, Sweden has a long history and no sharp beginning at least, not in the industrialized countries. If one was to establish the beginning of the environmental movement, December 1, 1930, might be the date to start from. On that date, a fine mist covered almost all of Belgium. In the Meuse Valley, with its iron and steel works, zinc smelter, and gas plants, that mist was particularly heavy. The fog combined with the smoke from the coal fires used in these industrial plants gradually became thicker and thicker until on December 3, various illnesses began to occur. 1/

2. Shortness of breath was the first complaint. But soon it seemed as if the whole population were coughing. Several thousand cases of respiratory disease were reported. During the four days that the smog (a combination of smoke and fog) lasted, sixty three deaths traceable to air pollution were recorded. Most of the illnesses and deaths occurred among the elderly, but even some young children were affected. 1/

3. Donara, Pennsylvania is a small town on the Monongahela river about thirty miles south of Pittsburg. Donara is the centre of a vast industrial complex. There are steel mills, a wire plant, zinc smelters, and coke plants nearby. Not only that, the city lies in a pocket with hills both to the east and to the west, and so the local people were accustomed to dirty air. But on one murky morning in 1948, on 26 October, many of them must have thought that the sun had not come up! By 28 October, two days later, citizens started complaining of shortness of breath, coughing, sore throats, headache and eye irritations. On 29 October, seventeen (17) people had died as a result of air pollution. 2/

4. A little more than two years later, in 1950, tragedy struck again. This time the place was Poza Rica, Mexico a town of about fifteen thousand people, situated on the Gulf of Mexico, east of Mexico City. The city is surrounded by natural gas fields. One of the by-products of the fields is hydrogen sulfide, from which a local industry produces sulfur. At about five o'clock in the morning of 24 November 1950, there was an accident at the factory. Large amounts of hydrogen sulfide were released into the air, and unfortunately, it was a hazy, foggy morning. Although the episode lasted less than an hour, twenty two people were killed and three hundred and twenty were hospitalized. 3/

1/ This Vital Air, this Vital Water man's Environmental Crisis: Thomas G. Ayles Worth: R and McNally and Company, San Francisco. pp. 9-13

2/ Ibid

3/ Itid

5. The worst air pollution tragedy in history occurred in London two years later. On December 3, 1952 four thousand people died as a direct result of air pollution. These examples cited are only the worst, countless other episodes have been recorded as a result of the mismanagement of the human environment. 4/

6. By now you may be wondering why all these disaster examples are being given? The point is that the African region should learn from the mistakes of the industrialized countries, and begin to address the problem of environmental protection and management before it becomes too late.

7. The other developments that led to the global movement for environmental protection and management and hence the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, was the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957/1958 which gave international co-operation a major impetus, because it demonstrated conclusively that world-wide scientific problems could be tackled successfully in this way..... IGY was also the direct inspiration of the International Biological Programme (IBP), 1964-1974, which had as its central theme "biological productivity and human welfare". 5/ The concept of understanding the environment within different ecological systems, and hence environmental protection and management, developed in the 1960s and 1970s during these international programmes, especially through the efforts of professional ecologists who developed the study of the environment into a scientific discipline.

8. In response to the mounting public concern generated by these examples cited, the first United Nations Conference on the "Human Environment" was convened in June 1972. Delegates from 113 nations met at Stockholm, Sweden and produced an 'action plan' with 109 separate recommendations. They also made a declaration of 26 'common principles' on man's rights and responsibilities in respect of the global environment.

9. The Stockholm Conference recommended that the United Nations as a whole should give special attention to these concerns which, in the action plan, were grouped within six subject areas:

(i) Human settlements
(ii) Human health
(iii) Environment and development
(iv) Natural disasters
(v) Oceans
(vi) Terrestrial ecosystems

4/ Ibid

5/ The state of the World Environment 1972-1982 UNEP/GC(SSC)/Inf.2: UNEP/GC/107, 29 January 1982.

The recommendations were then considered by the United Nations General Assembly at its Twenty seventh Session which approved Resolution No. 2997 (XXVII) setting out the institutional and financial arrangements to launch UNEP - the United Nations Environment Programme with a mandate to co-ordinate and catalyse all environmental activities on a global basis. By January 1973, UNEP was in operation, working out of temporary headquarters, first in Geneva and later in Nairobi, Kenya.

II. The efforts of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to protect the African environment

10. The questions that confront Africa today are: Are African countries exempt from environmental disasters like what other countries have experienced? If not, what are the nations in the region doing to safeguard and protect the African environment? Because of some of the examples cited of environmental disasters in the industrialized countries, it was not surprising that representatives of the developed industrialized countries approached the Stockholm Conference with environmental pollution problems weighing heavily on their minds, and with the need for a world-wide conservation programme to safeguard the human environment. Experiences in these countries have demonstrated that environmental deterioration could threaten their citizen's health and well-being, as well as those of developing countries.

11. Developing countries, especially those in the African region, approached Stockholm with a different perspectives. These were nations where poverty was rife, where infectious diseases took a terrible toll, where human settlements commonly failed to provide adequate shelter, clean drinking water and safe disposal of human wastes. Developing countries were also deliberately engaged in stimulating rapid change, with too limited financial resources and a marked shortage of skilled people. Therefore, there is the temptation to industrialize developing countries by the cheapest route first and then cure the resulting environmental problems afterwards.

12. It is from this background that the Economic Commission for Africa has been involved in environmental matters since 1971, when the first all African Seminar on the Human Environment was jointly sponsored by UNECA and the United Nations Secretariat, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 23-28 August 1971. This seminar was held as part of the preparation for the participation of the region in the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. 6/ Since 1971, ECA has incorporated an environment programme within its biennial work programme and priorities.

6/ Economic Commission for Africa - Report of the First-All African Seminar on Human Environment E/CN.14/532. (Addis Ababa 23-28 August 1971).

13. During this early period under review, the commission began work in 1972 on the identification of the major environmental problems in Africa with the promotion of research into their solutions. This was the directive of Addis Ababa seminar recommendation 36, and Stockholm recommendations 104(a), 95(d) and 53. The main objectives of the programme were to assist and provide advisory services to governments on the establishment of national environmental machineries responsible for safeguarding and improving the human environment, and to promote an awareness of major environmental problems in Africa.

14. In 1978, the present Environment Co-ordination Office was established within the Cabinet Office of the Executive Secretary with two additional staff and with specific functions. The Environment Co-ordination Office is mandated to review and to co-ordinate all development programmes and project activities of the various divisions within the commission in order to ensure that environmental considerations are fully taken into account in all of the commission's work programme and priorities. Thus, the Environment Co-ordination Office is the link on matters relating to the environment with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and all other UN organisations working on similar problems in Africa.

15. The current programme of work on the Environment in Africa and the Medium-Term Plan for 1984 to 1989 are based on the Lagos Plan of Action for the implementation of the Monrovia strategy for the economic development of Africa during the third United Nations Development Decade. The Lagos Plan of Action indicates the following priority areas of environmental concern in the Africa region: 7/

- Environmental sanitation and health, and safe drinking water supply;
- Deforestation and soil degradation;
- Desertification and drought;
- Marine pollution and conservation of marine resources;
- Environmental aspects of human settlements;
- Mining, relating to the rehabilitation of mined-out sites;
- Air pollution control;
- Environmental education and training, legislation and information dissemination.

16. For the implementation of the programme on the Environment in Africa, the ECA with the cooperation of UNEP, adopted its resolution 408 (XVI) of Human Settlements which called for the establishment of the Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment (IGRC/HS/ENV) with

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7/ Economic Commission for Africa E/CN.14/781/Add.1. Addis Ababa, 9-12 April 1980.

specific terms of reference on the environment. This joint Committee held its first meeting in July 1982 at Addis Ababa and it took decisions on strategies to solve pressing environmental problems in the region, namely: combating desertification, promotion of environmental training and review of environmental legislation.

17. A significant area of activity has been the Development of legislation for environmental protection in the ECA region. This was a joint ECA/UNEP project (FP/1002-79-02) which funded a mission of four consultants to assess the state of legislation for environmental protection in fifteen African countries in early 1980. Their report formed the basis for a seminar for Lawyers on the development of environmental protection legislation in the ECA region in October 1980. The report of the Seminar was adopted by the ECA Conference of Ministers by its resolution 412 (XV) which urged member States of the Commission to review their environmental protection legislation machineries for effective law enforcement at the national level. The End-of-Project Report (document E/CN.14/ECU/5) provides guidelines and recommendations to member States to implement the decision and for follow-up action.

18. The most significant activity in combating desertification in the Africa region was the adoption of ECA resolution 446 (XVII) on April 1982 which called for the establishment of a Regional Intergovernmental Committee on Combating Desertification in Africa to co-ordinate activities in the three areas affected by desertification in Africa, namely: the northern Saharan, the Sudano-Sahelian zone including the Horn of Africa and the Kalahari Desert area. An inter-agency mission, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) in June 1982, studied conditions in the Kalahari Desert area as an input to a joint ECA/UNSO/UNEP/ETMA Workshop on Combating Desertification in Africa, at Khartoum in October 1982.

19. Future environmental perspectives for the Africa region emphasize three main priority areas, namely: (i) meeting basic human needs such as provision of clean water, nutritious food, adequate shelter, sanitation and good health with basic education for the masses, in order to alleviate poverty and its accompanying ills such as, illiteracy, malnuttition, infant mortality, for the improvement of the standard of living and the quality of life of the African people; (ii) conservation of energy and of natural resources - such as, forests, wildlife, water, minerals, the seas, and the atmosphere, through wise management in the utilization of these resources within the context of the environment/ development scenario; (iii) promotion of environmental training programmes for manpower development to cope with environmental activities relating to the impact of the Industrial Development Decade for Africa for pollution control, the Transport and Communication Decade for Africa and its effect on tourism, and the African Food Plan with regards to the use of pesticides and fertilizers. In addition to these, the Commission is also promoting the creation of environmental awareness for the African public at-large through the dissemination of environmental information by the mass media within each African country.

20. The issue of environmental awareness at the national level for the protection of nature in Africa is taking a revised developmental pattern as compared with how the awareness process first developed among the scientific and academic communities at the national levels in the industrialized developed countries. It was the scientific group who first influenced the thinking of local government officials, the business community and the general public in the industrialized countries. The pattern of environmental protection awareness emerging in Africa depended on two major reasons:

(i) The concept of education of the old established colonial institutions of higher learning in Africa and

(ii) The academic and scientific communities in Africa tending to be closed off and aloof from public policy issues or affairs.

21. The old established colonial higher institutions of learning in Africa were established or developed to teach Africans the "Law and Order Concepts of Education". Such disciplines as Biblical studies, early English Literature, English History, Political Science, Greek and Roman Culture, and Law and Diplomacy were, and to some extent still are, the emphasis of some African Universities today even after independence. Therefore, to a large extent, scientific education and training geared towards finding national solutions to local problems were de-emphasized. Three decades ago, disciplines such as technology, marine science, hydrology, geology, environmental sciences and management were not available at institutions in Africa. The few Africans who were trained in the scientific field did so mostly in the industrialized countries. Therefore, a large percentage of Africans trained in the scientific and other fields such as ecology, environmental science and management were not working at the national levels, instead one finds this group of trained Africans in the industrialized countries (Brain-drain) or at international organizations. To make matters worse, when so-called experts are sent by industrialized countries to African organizations or countries, the expertise of this group of highly trained Africans is not utilized or respected both by the Africans themselves and by the donor countries or organizations.

22. As a result of this historical colonial educational experience, the African environmentalists and scientists who would have developed the first core of local and national "pressure groups" who would have influenced and educated local government officials, the business community and the general public, relative to the awareness of environmental protection at the national levels are not there. It is not surprising then, that environmental consciousness in Africa is emerging from industrialized countries, international and regional organizations and transcending itself to the national and local levels.

23. Since independence, the academic and scientific communities in Africa, at the local and national levels still tend to be closed off and aloof from public policy issues as a whole. This is because of:

(i) the small number of educated people in the scientific and academic communities at the local and national levels;

(ii) at the national and local levels, there seems to be an environment of great suspicion of the academic and scientific communities as a group. Perhaps, this is so because of the high illiteracy rate in most of the countries of the region;

(iii) resources for the publication of academic research and findings are inadequate or none existent for dissemination of information on the African environment.

24. This pattern of development of environmental awareness in Africa could have serious implications because, the "pressure groups" started from the industrialized countries articulated through international organizations to regional, subregional and then to the national levels. In 1972 during the period of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, we witnessed an atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainity among African delegates. The feeling of apprehension was also shared by delegates from other developing countries at the Stockholm Conference. That feeling existed because, one of the over-riding concerns of the developing countries was then, and still today is, the inter-relationship between development and environment. In other words, the third world group at the Conference was suspicious of the sudden concern by the industrialized countries about global environmental problems, especially when third world countries were just beginning to achieve some progress towards economic and industrial development. The question they asked themselves was, will this new global environmental awareness retard Africa's development efforts?

25. If the awareness process had developed in Africa first at the local and national levels as it happened in the industrialized countries, this suspicion and apprehension would not have occurred because, there are environmental problems in Africa, even though the issues are of a different character and dimension. As an indication of the pattern of environmental awareness, there seems to be emerging two general views regarding environmental protection and development as a public policy issue in the African region. These views can be referred to as: (a) the "wolf in sheep's clothing" or the pro-development at any cost group and (b) the "balanced development group".

26. The "wolf in sheep's clothing" group feels that this concern among the industrialized countries articulated and vocalized through the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm could be a trap set to retard third world's industrial development efforts. Therefore, one hears such discussion at social gatherings as this:

> "Allow third world countries to develop economically and industrially as the U.S., Soviet Union and Japan and then together we can all be concerned about the problems of pollution and the environment".

In other words, first develop at any cost, and then worry about environmental protection later. Such attitude could be very costly for organizations who administer environmental programmes at the African regional level. Because it requires first of all, a convincing campaign by industrialized countries and

regional organizations to educate and convince government officials, the business community and the general public at national levels, that such environmental problems as combating desertification, poverty, water-borne and other endemic diseases, deforestation, inadequate sewerage, inadequate infrastructure development and housing needs for both urban and rural dwellers are really environmental problems that do exist in Africa.

27. The "balanced development growth" group feels that environmental deterioration is occuring in third world countries. Therefore, environmental protection as a public policy issue needs to be addressed. But, unfortunately, in the beginning of the environmental consciousness at the global level, the issues of environmental protection and management had, in the initial stages, been posed in terms of industrial pollution. Therefore, the impression has developed that the protection of the environment is the exclusive concern of the developed countries. The balanced developmental growth group argues that third world countries have a stake in the development of plans for the protection of our 'one earth'. Because, as third world countries industrialize and economic and social development proceeds, third world countries will be confronted with the environmental problems which the industrialized countries now face. Therefore, it is necessary that developing countries should learn from the mistakes of the industrialized countries and develop proper infrastructure and manpower capabilities to protect the African environment for posterity.

III. The role of AAPAM and the new challenge of environmental management in Africa

28. Last but not the least, it is becoming clear that the African Association for Public Administration and Management could be an effective medium for developing an environmental awareness which is urgently needed within the public sector. The question that needs to be addressed is, what role this organization can play in this new challenge?

29. Presently in Africa, the public sector seems to dominate all other sectors of the society, therefore, public administrators as the focal point of administration in the region should encourage and support the establishment and publication of professional journals regarding environmental management as it relates to development in Africa. Such a journal can be used for the publication of research and survey articles of environmental concern at the national and local policy levels. Any effective endeavour to awaken public awareness regarding environmental protection and management should be directed first at public administrators at the local and national levels.

30. AAPAM's role can be effective in this endeavour by encouraging its member countries to:

(a) incorporate environmental dimensions into their national development plans;

(b) translate environmental policies for development into legislation for the protection and management of the African environment within their national legal framework;

(c) ensure that environmental manpower infrastructure development at the national levels should and ought to be a priority of national manpower development plans;

(d) establish centralized environmental management and protection institutions at the national level with adequate staff and the proper mandate to protect the environment;

(e) promote environmental consciousness raising programmes and activities at local and national levels through the mass media. In this regard, AAPAM could sponsor once a month in each member's country an environmental awareness forum on television and radio.

31. It is our view, that at this beginning of AAPAM's second decade as a professional organization, AAPAM should make suitable efforts to begin a meaningful dialogue in order to make tangible contributions to this new challenge of environmental management in Africa. Environmental protection and management are public policy issues, therefore, the African Association of Public Administration and Management should and ought to take the lead in promoting environmental awareness in Africa. "This is the challenge".

32. The Environment Co-ordination Office of the Economic Commission for Africa, hopes that your deliberations at this first decade of AAPAM existence as an organization, will enhance administration and management in the public sector of Africa.